*Kwansei Gakuin University*
*Humanities Review*
Vol. 21, 2016
Nishinomiya, Japan

# Personality Profiles, Learning Styles, and the Japanese Student: An Exploratory Study

Audrey MORENO*, Kevin BARTLETT*

## Abstract

This paper outlines results of an MBTI survey conducted in the school of Science and Technology at Kwansei Gakuin University. 87 participants took part in the study to identify what personality types were most prevalent among Japanese university students with the intent to apply corresponding teaching and learning strategies for more effective student-focused instruction. Results were tabulated to show dominant personality preferences of the entire sample as well as differences based on gender distribution. This data will be used as the basis for a future developmental study on MBTI personality preferences and applied learning strategy within the social construct of education in Japan.

## Introduction

Walking into a new classroom with a room full of strangers can be a daunting task for teachers at the beginning of each school year. While teachers do their best to get to know their students' learning needs, in reality, ever-increasing student populations and faculty workload, among other institutional constraints, limit how well teachers are able to fully engage in a dialogic classroom. In these circumstances, most teachers are rarely able to individually assess student-learning styles, much less systematically address them. Although the link between personality testing and learning style is not a new concept (McCaulley et al., 1983; Myers &

* Instructor of English as a Foreign Language, School of Science and Technology, Kwansei Gakuin University

McCaulley, 1989), this paper advocates a resuscitation of the use of personality testing in the classroom to address differing learning styles and effectively facilitate more interactive instruction.

## MBTI

One of the most widely used instruments for measuring personality traits and classifying learning style is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Schroeder, 1993). Based on Carl Jung's (1921) concept of archetypes and personality theory, Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers developed the MBTI questionnaire with the intent of helping others understand themselves and others better so as to avoid the type of "destructive conflicts" the world was experiencing during the Secand World War (Myers & Myers, 1995). After a more than seventy-year evolution over multiple iterations, the current MBTI consists of four dichotomous scaling: (1) Extraversion-Introversion, (2) Sensing-Intuition, (3) Thinking-Feeling, and (4) Judging-Perceiving. These typologies result in one of sixteen possible four-letter combinations, which define a particular personality type. For example, an individual with a strong preference for Introversion, Intuition, Feeling, and Judging would be identified as an INTJ.

Though not solely intended for this purpose, the variations of these sixteen combinations have been consistently linked to defining specific student learning styles and can effectively be used to assess and address these needs (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Sharp, 2003; Montgomery and Groat, 1998; Ely, 1988). The differences between these typologies and a brief outline of correlated learning styles are outlined below:

### 1. Orientation to Life

**E**xtraversion* ← → **I**ntroversion

| | |
|---|---|
| Focused more on the outer world, garners more energy from group interaction and application | Focused more on the inner world of self, concept and ideas, garners more energy from working alone. |
| Prefer role-play and group activities, are generally less afraid of making mistakes and can engage in classroom tasks with little planning | Need more time before engaging in group activities, prefer individual reflective tasks with time to plan and edit |

### 2. Perception

**S**ensing ⟷ **In**tuitive

| | |
|---|---|
| Tend to be more practical, prefer facts and data | Tend to be guided more by intuition, impressions, and imagination |
| Need more concrete examples, modeling and direct application in tasks such as case studies, group projects and presentations | Comfortable with more open-ended theoretical questions and excel at activities where creativity and imagination are encouraged |

### 3. Decision Making

**T**hinking ⟷ **F**eeling

| | |
|---|---|
| Make decisions based on fair, objective and logical thinking. | Decision-making is more subjective and focused on a search for harmony. |
| Learners prefer more emphasis on theoretical ideas and application of knowledge in a larger context | Learners prefer data analysis and activities which dissect information to find contrast and cause |

*Note: Extroversion is spelled Extraversion following the use by Jung (1921/1971).

### 4. Attitude towards the outside world

**J**udging ⟷ **P**erceiving

| | |
|---|---|
| Prefer extensive planning and control | Prefer more spontaneity and an adaptive approach |
| Need clear rules and direction | Function well in less direct environments, approach learning like a puzzle or a game rather than a simple formula to receive and reproduce |

## MBTI Official and Unofficial Testing

While many studies have measured the efficacy of using the MBTI in education (Stone and McAdams, 2000; Jensen, Wood and Wood, 2003; Felder, Felder and Dietz, 2002; Felder and Brent, 2005; Lester, Schofield and Chapman, 2006), administering the official MBTI is often impractical for most instructors given the limitations of school budgets, time, and, with non-native English speakers, language proficiency. Nonetheless, many modified versions like the one used in this study and free unofficial MBTI online tests are readily available. Modified versions of the MBTI can be easily administered in class and, though not maintaining the reliability

and validity of the official MBTI, still provide useful insight into students' learning styles not otherwise available in large classrooms with various situational constraints.

Below is a preliminary study to collect learning style data from Japanese university students. This data will be the basis for a future developmental study on MBTI personality preferences and applied learning strategy within a specific sociocultural focus.

## Methodology

In an effort to explore ways to adapt the MBTI to a Japanese university classroom, a modified version of the MBTI for adolescents by Mamchur (1996) was selected because of its adapted English language level deemed appropriate for second-year Japanese university English language learners. Express written permission from Dr. Carolyn Mamchur was acquired to photocopy and administer this test to students[1]. Before administering the test to students, the MBTI for adolescents was given to two Japanese language teachers to check language comprehension and subsequently supplemented with Japanese translations of a limited number of key terms and concepts. Additionally, the results of the 16 Types as they apply to students provided in Manchur (1996) were translated into Japanese by an official Japanese translator to ensure that students fully understood how their personality type corresponded to their student learning styles as defined by Mamchur.

The modified MBTI for adolescents was administered to 87 2nd year students in the Science and Technology Department at Kwansei Gakuin University (KGU) during three 90-minute class periods interspersed with additional English activities after each section as part of a self-reflective unit on identity during the 2016 Spring Semester. Although students were allowed to assist each other with comprehension during the administration of the test, analysis of class seating charts and student personality results did not reveal similar results among students seated in close proxinity.

## Results

Administration of this adapted MBTI version resulted in the following personality type profiles:

---

1 ) Mamchur's modified MBTI test for yearly use is also available for purchase.

## Type distribution: All participants, N = 87

**Table 1 MBTI type table and general distribution (%)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ISTJ 4.5% | ISFJ 9.1% | INFJ 8.0% | INTJ 9.1% |
| ISTP 3.4% | ISFP 9.1% | INFP 16.0% | INTP 11.4% |
| ESTP 6.8% | ESFP 1.1% | ENFP 5.7% | ENTP 6.8% |
| ESTJ 3.4% | ESFJ 2.2% | ENFJ 0% | ENTJ 2.2% |

**Table 2 Percentage of each bi-polar preference**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| E 29% | S 40% | T 48% | J 39% |
| I 71% | N 60% | F 52% | P 61% |

**Table 3 Female and male distribution of each bi-polar preference**

| I | E | S | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male = 75% | Male = 25% | Male = 48% | Male = 52% |
| Female = 65% | Female = 35% | Female = 27% | Female = 74% |
| T | F | J | P |
| Male = 63% | Male = 38% | Male = 48% | Male = 52% |
| Female = 23% | Female = 78% | Female = 23% | Female = 78% |

## Type Distribution: Female, N = 31

**Table 4 Adapted MBTI type table and female distribution (%)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ISTJ 0% | ISFJ 0% | INFJ 12.9% | INTJ 0% |
| ISTP 3.2% | ISFP 12.9% | INFP 25.8% | INTP 9.6% |
| ESTP 0% | ESFP 3.2% | ENFP 16.1% | ENTP 6.4% |
| ESTJ 0% | ESFJ 6.4% | ENFJ 0% | ENTJ 3.2% |

## Type Distribution: Male, N = 56

**Table 5 Adapted MBTI type table and male distribution (%)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ISTJ 7.1% | ISFJ 4.2% | INFJ 5.3% | INTJ 14.2% |
| ISTP 3.5% | ISFP 7.1% | INFP 10.7% | INTP 12.5% |
| ESTP 10.7% | ESFP 0% | ENFP 0% | ENTP 7.1% |
| ESTJ 5.3% | ESFJ 0% | ENFJ 0% | ENTJ 1.7% |

## Discussion

Results indicate clear preferences for a number of types. Considering the dominant personality preference of the entire sample, INFP (16%) is the most pronounced (Table 1), followed by INTP (11.4%), and ISFJ, INTJ, and ISFP (9.1%). Among these dominant preferences, the most distinct typology is Introversion (71%) versus Extraversion (29%). This appears to be consistent with current research on Japanese learners, which suggests that Japanese learners are unwilling and/or unable to participate in classes that are focused on conversation and discussion generally associated with Extraversion (Nishino, 2008). Additionally, socio-cultural considerations of learner experiences in prior education in Japanese high schools, where students do not have as much opportunities to express themselves in the classroom and are the receivers of knowledge from teachers who are seen as the possessors of knowledge, may also have a strong influence on the dominance of Introversion at the university level (Sugimoto, 2010). However, while sociocultural factors may influence this preference, personality type and corresponding learning styles are not immutable. Both can be attuned and adjusted with varied learning environment, supplemented learning strategies (Montgomery and Groat 1998), and adjusted pedagogical methods (Randall et al., 1995). For instance, with the sample above, more attention to developing strategies for compensating for Introversion and opportunities to develop stronger Extraversion through activities, self-reflection and encouragement would prove beneficial (Mamchur, 1996).

Further break down of data according to gender also yields significance difference in bi-polar type preference. For example, although there is only a slight preference for Feeling (52%) over Thinking (48%) in the general sample population as a whole (Table 2), this shifts considerably with gender differentiation. As seen in Table 3, females have a stronger preference for Feeling (78%) over male participants' Thinking (38%) preference. Results are consistent with additional MBTI findings which suggest that approximately two-thirds of women have profiles where Feeling predominates (Montgomery and Groat, 1998). Tabulated results of gender differentiation also generate differing dominant personality types with females exhibiting the dominant INFP pattern (Table 4) while males are largely INTJ types (Table 5).

Differing personality types and corresponding learning styles can influence how male and female students function in a classroom largely dominated by INTJ faculty and either stymie or ease student-faculty relations (Grasha, 1996). For example, given that test subjects are from largely gender-dominated scientific disciplines, women may find the logical, objective emphasis in the teaching styles in these classes alienating given their strong Feeling predilection and dominant INFP preference. Hence, to adapt to the specific learning styles of females with an INFP prefer-

ence, instructors could offer more flexibility in their program and more opportunities for students "to follow their own creative inclinations" (Mamchur, 1996). INFP students are also extremely sensitive to criticism, and as a result, the use of criticism and corrective feedback should be carefully considered since overuse of criticism could alienate these students and potentially impede learning.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrated the administration of an adopted MBTI to assess potential dominant learning styles and presented examples of how these results can be used to address them. More intensive analysis of distribution will be considered in a future developmental study to determine how the social constructs of education in Japan play a role in influencing personality types as well as whether students find this self-awareness of personality and corresponding learning style useful in an English language classroom.

Nevertheless, what can already be stated is that with less and less time available to interact with students and assess individual learning styles, teachers would do well to make use of personality testing in the classroom. Directly testing and considering student personality type preference can potentially help teachers be more self-reflective and explicit in the way they address individual student-learning styles, help students develop learning strategies, and ultimately, aim towards a more cooperative learning environment as both students and teachers learn more about themselves and others.

## References

Ehrman, M. & Oxford, R. (1995). Cognition Plus: Correlates of Language. *The Modern Language Journal,* 67-89.

Ely, C. M. (1988). "Personality: Its Impact on Attitudes Toward Classroom Activities." *Foreign Language Annals* 21, 1, 25-32.

Ely, C. M. (1989). Tolerance of ambiguity and use of second language learning strategies, *Language Learning,* 36, 1-25.

Felder, R. M., Felder, G. N., & Dietz, E. J. (2002). The effects of personality type on engineering student performance and attitudes, *Journal of Engineering Education,* 91, 1, 3-17.

Felder, R. M. & Brent, R. (2005). Understanding student differences, *Journal of Engineering Education,* 94, 1, 57-72.

Grasha, A. F. (1996). *Teaching with style: A practical guide to enhancing learning by understanding teaching and learning styles.* Pittsburgh: Alliance Publishers.

Jensen, D., Wood, K., & Wood, J. (2003). Hands-on Activities, Interactive Multimedia and Improved Team Dynamics for Enhancing Mechanical Engineering Curricula, *International*

*Journal of Engineering Education,* 19, 6, 874-884.

Lester, E., Schofield, D., & Chapman, P. (2006). The interaction of engineering 'types': A study of group dynamics and its relationship to self and peer assessment during computer-based exercises. *Engineering Education: The Journal of the Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre,* 1, 1, 39-49.

Mamchur, C. (1996). *A teacher's guide to cognitive type theory and learning style,* Virginia, VA: ASCD.

McCaulley, M. H. Godleski, E. S., Yokomoto, C. F., Harrisberger, L., & Sloan, E. D. (1983). Applications of psychological type in engineering education. Engineering Education, 394-400.

Montgomery, S. M. & Groat, L. N. (1998). Student learning styles and their implications for teaching. *CRLT Occasional Papers,* 10, 1-8.

Moore, Ll, Dietz, J., and Detlaff, A., (2004). Field notes: Using the Myers-Briggs Type indicator in field education. *Journal of Social Work Education,* 10-19.

Myers, I. B., & McCaulley, M. H. (1989). *Manual: A guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.* Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Myers, I. B. & Myers, P. B. (1995). *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type.* Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Nishino, T. (2008). Japanese secondary school teachers' beliefs and practices regarding communicative language teaching: an exploratory survey. *Japan Association of Language Teaching Journal,* 30, 1, 27-51.

Randall, L. E., Buscher, C., & Swerkes, S. (1995). Learning styles of physical education majors: Implications for teaching and learning. *Excellence in College Teaching,* 6, 2, 57-77.

Schroeder, C. C. (1993, September/October). New students－New learning styles. *Change,* 21-26.

Sharp, A. (2003). Reading comprehension and text organization. New York, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

Stone, R. B. & McAdams, D. A. (2000). The touchy-feely side of engineering education: bringing hands-on experiences in the classroom. *Proceeding of the American Society for Engineering Education Conference,* St Louis, Mo, 18-22.

Sugimoto, Y. (2010). *An introduction to Japanese society.* (3rd Edition ed.) London: Cambridge University Press.